



## STRAIGHT GOLF

BY ANNA ALICE CHAPIN

"**B**EASTLY of you, Pritchard, to keep us in town a day like this!" puffed Darragh, the fattest and fussiest of the directors, as he plumped into a chair near the window, and mopped his face on one of the three clean handkerchiefs with which he provided himself in sultry weather.

"Too bad, Darragh!—How are you, Kent?—I fancy we are all in the same boat, as to not liking the city to-day."

"I wish I *were* in a boat!" said McGlade, mournfully. He was a brown, quiet man, thin but muscular, with a veiled sparkle in his eye. Kent was obviously in a bad humor, and responded curtly to the greetings of his fellow-directors.

The president's room, at the back of the Cosmopolitan Bank, was cool by comparison with the baking streets outside; but all the men, including Pritchard, the bank president, himself, were chafing to be out of town. It was far from being a full meeting, as most of the bank's officers were off investing great fortunes in summer rest and coolness. But half a dozen were still in town, and Kent had motored down from Ardsley in response to a telephone message from the president. Pritchard had simply explained that he was obliged to call a directors' meeting on short notice, because of an unexpected and, he thought, important situation in the bank.

"Well, what is wrong?" demanded stout Darragh. "Somebody embezzled a million? I don't believe you would have been heathenish enough to call us together for less."

"No," said Pritchard, smiling, but with a certain gravity, "it's quite a small matter so far as money goes. There is only a thousand involved."

"A thousand!" growled Kent. "You

did this for the sake of a thousand? Pritchard, you're in your dotage! I'd pay a thousand gladly to be on my way to St. Andrews this minute."

"I could have done thirty-six holes before dinner," lamented the gloomy McGlade. "Did you have your pocket picked, Pritchard?"

"Why," asked Darragh, bitterly, "did n't you call the cop on the corner?"

"He wants to take up a subscription," suggested Atkinson, who had just come in.

"Well," said Pritchard, quietly, "it does n't happen to be the quantity of the money that is important; it's one small point about it, which I thought was worth our while taking up. The money has been stolen."

"Stolen!" the men repeated, in varying keys of surprise, incredulity, and increasing seriousness. "Stolen, Pritchard—from *this* bank?"

"Yes, gentlemen." Pritchard had in some subtle way become official as he addressed them. "There is a leakage in our bank. Small or large, it is all the same. A crack big enough to let out a little water will, in time, let out a great deal. And it is a menace. Gentlemen, the Cosmopolitan is so big a bank that it cannot afford to lose a thousand dollars by leakage."

Darragh volunteered rather ineptly that "a chain is no stronger than its weakest link," and the president sighed a shade impatiently. Darragh, fat and platitudinous, tried his patience.

"There's no question about it," said Kent, who was dry and businesslike. "You've done the right thing in bringing us here, Pritchard. If we have a hole being drilled in our vaults, it's time we knew it."

"I wish I had had my game first," murmured McGlade, regretfully, "but"—

"Oh, confound your game, McGlade!" put in Atkinson, crisply. "This is business."

"But," proceeded McGlade, "I can see an excuse,—some very faint, small, trifling excuse,—for poor Pritchard: naturally he could n't handle this thing alone." He grinned maliciously.

Atkinson went on: "Now, Pritchard, what are the facts?"

"The facts are so simple that, for me at least, they complicate the situation. Our first paying teller is one thousand short on his cash for yesterday."

"First paying teller. Is n't that Teddy Thornton?" said McGlade.

"Yes. A good boy, I've always thought."

"Who O.K.'d his cash for the day?" said Atkinson.

"Green, the cashier. No question about old Green!"

"No shortage then?"

"No."

"Did the paying teller put them into the safe himself?" asked Kent.

"Yes. Murdock, the man on the second desk, was with him. The notes were tied up and docketed in the usual way. Thornton closed the safe, set the combination, and said good night to Green. This morning one bundle of notes, just one thousand dollars, was missing."

"It lies then," said Atkinson, "between Thornton and Murdock?"

"Unless some one robbed the safe in the night, in which case they would hardly let it go at a thousand. No, I am not quite fair in that. Strictly speaking, it hardly does lie between them. Thornton is responsible for the money that goes into that safe, and both he and Murdock declare that the latter never touched any of the notes."

"So the proposition," said Kent, "is that Thornton had his notes O.K.'d by Green, and then held out on one package while he deposited the others, trusting to the small sum being overlooked."

The bank president shrugged his shoulders.

"One does not care for the assumption," he said. "Thornton is a simple, pleasant lad enough; it seems too bad. But there it is. Who else could it be? I under-

stand the boy has been hard up lately. And no one else touched the money after it left Green's hands."

"Did Murdock stay after Thornton?"

"No; it is absolutely certain that Murdock left first. Green saw Thornton go, some minutes after Murdock had gotten his hat and said good night."

There was a brief pause.

"Want to question any one?" asked Pritchard.

"Yes," said McGlade, who had made no comment. "I want a look at Murdock."

"Why, certainly," said the president, clearly surprised. He rang a bell, and it was Murdock himself who came to the door,—a slender young man, with a narrow chest, and hollows in his temples. He wore a look of anxiety and concern. So, for that matter, did every one about the branch office that day. "What!" each man seemed secretly and stealthily asking himself, "an untrustworthy among these trusted employees of finance?" Each man looked askance at his fellows.

The impression made by Murdock was wholly creditable. To the few inquiries put to him by the directors he responded frankly and respectfully. There was of course no implied reflection upon Mr. Thornton, the first-paying teller, either in questions or in answers, but the result of the interview was merely an accentuation and crystallization of the first general impression: Thornton was the only conceivable suspect.

"Do you know the combination of the safe, Mr. Murdock?" Kent asked in his clipping way.

"No, sir,—not the present one," the young man answered civilly. "Mr. Thornton changes the combination from time to time."

"And was he the only person who knew it?" said Atkinson.

"Why, sir," Murdock returned, "I presume Mr. Green knew it. I suppose Mr. Thornton would hardly have been given so much responsibility as *that*."

It was said so simply that there was no suggestion of a sneer.

Murdock was just leaving the room when McGlade, who had asked to see him, but who as yet had not addressed him, said kindly, "You look pulled down, Mr. Murdock."

The clerk gave him a puzzled glance. "I imagine it's the heat, sir," he said. "It has been very trying."

"You should get out into the fresh air and play some good healthy game, golf or tennis," pursued McGlade, to the astonishment of his fellow-directors. "Do you ever play golf, Mr. Murdock?"

"Never, sir," returned young Murdock, quietly. "I do not care for sports."

He waited a moment at the door, and then, seeing that they were through with him, bowed just a fraction too humbly, and withdrew.

"Nice, civil young fellow," said Darragh, approvingly. "Pritchard, I wish this highly esthetic private room of yours had a few five-cent palm-leaf fans."

"I'll send out and buy you some in a minute," said Pritchard, disgustedly. "Are you sure you don't want a soda lemonade, too? Well, gentlemen?"

"He's a good man, is n't he?" said Kent, seriously.

"Murdock? Excellent. A deserving case, too. Worked his way up from nothing in particular."

"Was n't Teddy Thornton promoted in his stead?" said McGlade.

"Yes, over his head, as it were. But they have always seemed friendly, in spite of it, and—well, it's rather a pity now."

"I wonder!" remarked McGlade, and lapsed into silence.

"Just as a matter of form, I think we should speak to Thornton himself," said Atkinson. "Will you have him in, Pritchard?"

The president sighed as he touched the bell a second time. "I hate facing the lad," he said frankly. "I've known him since he was a child."

"So have I," said McGlade.

"His father and I were friends at Harvard," said Pritchard. "And Teddy—oh, ask Mr. Thornton to come here a moment, please. You know, gentlemen, one must not let the past influence one's judgment of the present."

"And I'm not so sure of *that*, either," muttered McGlade, half to himself.

And just then Teddy Thornton came in.

He was, to look at, quite a commonplace type, just the usual clean, well-set-up young American turned out by our big universities in increasing thousands every

year. He was sandy-haired and fair-skinned, wide of shoulder and narrow of hip and thigh, and he had a pair of clear, green-gray eyes with a twinkle in them. There was nothing else about him that would lend itself to description. Teddy Thornton was a hopelessly every-day sort of person. The older men looked at him with mixed feelings, chiefly those of regret. Most of them had known his father.

"How do you do, Thornton?" said Kent, gruffly.

"Oh, how are you, Mr. Kent?" said the boy, eagerly.

"Hello, Teddy!" remarked McGlade, unofficially.

"How are you, sir?" said the first paying teller, with a faint, boyish grin. Then his face fell once more into the worried mold which was the order of the day. He turned toward the president with a squaring of his shoulders.

"You wanted me, sir?"

"See here, Thornton," said Pritchard, "there's no use beating about the bush. We've always liked you, and we want you to have a decent deal. We—" He paused.

"Yes, sir," said Teddy Thornton. He was a little pale, and the twinkle had gone out of the green-gray eyes, but they looked clearer than ever.

"You know,—well," said the president, desperately, "you know it looks queer about that thousand."

"Yes, sir." The answer came prompt and steady.

"We thought you might care to tell us how it happened."

Teddy shook his head, but he looked straight at the president. "Nothing to tell, sir. I took the money from Mr. Green, and counted it again myself, just for luck, before I put it in the safe. Then I set the combination, and followed Murdock out. I meant to catch up with him, and walk up-town with him, but I think he must have caught the car ahead of me. This morning the money was n't there. That's all."

"What was your combination?" asked McGlade.

"The same as for the past week, sir." Teddy gave the numbers.

"No one knew it?"

"Just the office, sir."

"We understood from Mr. Murdock that he did not know it."

"That 's funny! Probably Murdock thought it had been changed again."

"Mr. Thornton," said Pritchard, "are you prepared to swear that yours were the last hands, to your knowledge, that touched those notes last night?"

"Yes, sir, absolutely."

"And that you yourself put them into the safe, shut and locked it personally, and left the bank after Mr. Murdock?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must realize that this is rather a serious admission, and makes the entire responsibility rest with you?"

"I suppose so, sir."

A pause. "That 's all, Mr. Thornton."

"Very well, sir."

"Teddy!" said McGlade.

The boy turned and looked at him. Then a faint smile showed on his white face.

"I did n't take it, Mr. McGlade," he said, and left the room with his head up.

McGlade leaned slowly back in his chair, and breathed a long, inaudible sigh that might have been relief.

"Well—and now?" said the president.

"Well," said Kent, curtly, "it looks as though we had to fix it on some one, and"—

"Maybe," suggested Atkinson, humanely, "we could just let the young man resign, without pressing any charge?"

"It will mean the end of his career anyway," said McGlade.

The president turned upon him. "Hang it, man, I know it will!" he exclaimed testily. "But we can't consider his career. We 're here to take care of our bank."

"But suppose he did n't do it, after all?" said Darragh.

"Can't help it; not our concern," said Pritchard. "We can't keep any one we 're doubtful about, whether he 's guilty or not. This is n't brutality, you know, it 's just business."

"Sane and safe, like the New Fourth," murmured McGlade. "You 're right, Pritchard, of course. Business is business. Only—sometimes a very unbusinesslike little thing will throw a light on a business proposition. Now, for instance"—he hesitated.

"Go ahead, McGlade," said Pritchard, resignedly. "You 've something on your mind; get rid of it!"

"It 's just a story," said McGlade, lighting a cigar. "Not much of a story in itself, but it shows,—well, let us say that I think it will serve to illustrate my point, and we 'll let it go at that. It 's"—he puffed a second to establish his light—"it 's a golf-story. We are all golfers here, I know,—except that poor benighted idiot of an Atkinson, who is a lazy brute, and prefers yachting. You others all play golf"—

"When we can," put in Darragh, blinking reproachfully.

"And you 'll appreciate my little anecdote. If necessary," added McGlade, "we 'll fix up a chart for Atkinson."

"You know the little coast town in New Jersey where I go in the summer? Jolly little place; quiet and informal, but lots of nice people, and a fine feeling of comradeship. And first-class golf. Best little links for its size that I know and a bully crowd in the club, men who are clean-bred sportsmen from their cradles, and that it 's a privilege to play with. You know just what all that sort of thing means in a place."

"Well, we 've always been keen about the game, and have got up cups and medals out of all proportion to the size and importance of our golf club. We 've held some cracking good tournaments, too, and had some of the lowest-handicapped men in our parts down to compete. The time I want to tell you about was a cup day, some few years back, when there were all sorts of entries and all sorts of handicaps. I was one of the greens committee, and there was a lot of interest taken all around."

"The finals came on a fine, open day, and there were a raft of pretty girls at the club-house, and tea, and pleasant fool things of that sort. Green turf, blue sky, motors at the portico within view of the first tee,—you know, the approved setting. There were a lot of young chaps down from college,—it was in June, just after Class Day. A few of them played corking good games,—especially one freckle-faced boy of nineteen, a freshman at Harvard. I knew his people, and he was a thoroughbred little chap, who played all his games very hard."

"He came through his half of the tournament splendidly, and met Crane in the finals for the cup,—Frank Crane of Garden City. You know Crane, a six man in the Metropolitan, and a crack-a-jack good golfer. We were all there to see them play off, and a corking good match it was. Crane was giving him five strokes, and it was nip and tuck between them. The freckle-faced boy played a splendid game, and it was anybody's match right up to the end. At the sixteenth, the lad ran down a long put, and a half at the seventeenth put him one up, playing the home hole. I want you to fully appreciate this situation, I mean as it affects the boy. It was a great day for him, with his father looking on, and, for all I know, a girl in the background somewhere. It seemed as if he simply *had* to win that cup! And I must say he played like one possessed.

"Now the eighteenth, at Wampsted, is an easy hole. It's a drive and a pitch for anybody,—about two hundred and fifty yards, with a big rolling green and nothing in the way. The lie of the ground is a sort of punch-bowl effect, so that every one around the club-house had a clear view of the putting-green.

"The boy had the honor,—Atkinson, that means that he drove off first. He got a good long ball, with a little slice; it fell into the long grass on the right of the course. Crane drove a beauty straight down the center and a good distance. The boy was away,—that means he was farther from the hole than the other fellow, Atkinson,—so he played first. He made a clean approach, and Crane, too, played on to the green.

"Every one watched the putting breathlessly, for if they took the same number of puts it would mean a victory for the boy, as he was already one ahead. And he was popular with every one,—being the best possible sort, who could 'play the game.' So, when each of them holed out in two more, there was a sort of general deep breath from all the lookers-on; for it looked as if the boy had won.

"Crane stretched out his hand to him across the hole.

"'Congratulations!' he said. 'You played a splendid game!'

"The boy shook hands heartily enough, but he said right away: 'Why, that was

n't a half, Mr. Crane. You won that hole.'

"'How do you make that out?' said Crane.

"'Why,' said the boy, 'while I was addressing my ball down there in the grass, I moved it. That counts one, you know.'

"The man looked at him. 'I did n't see it,' he said a little oddly.

"'I know you did n't,' said the freckle-faced boy, rather impatiently; 'that 's why I 'm telling you.'

"It happened that Crane won the extra hole when they played it off later. So, you see, because the boy would n't keep his mouth shut about something which no one could have seen but himself, and because not even the thought of his people looking on could *make* him keep it shut, he—he did n't win the cup," ended McGlade.

There was a short silence. Then President Pritchard brought his hand down upon the table so that the wood echoed.

"I 'd rather have had such a lad for my son," he said, "than the winner of forty cups!"

"That 's what I thought," said McGlade, quietly, as he threw away his dead cigar and lighted a fresh one. "He 's out there waiting to be fired for dishonesty."

There was a quick ripple of exclamations. "Teddy Thornton?"

McGlade nodded.

Then came a sort of explosion. They were all golfers, and they loved a good sportsman.

"By the Lord Harry," cried fat Daragh, who was a golf enthusiast despite his flesh, "a boy that 's good enough to do that is good enough for the Cosmopolitan Bank!"

Pritchard, his face working a little, turned to Kent: "You, too?"

"I guess his word will stand," said the business man, shortly. He, too, was a devotee.

"Atkinson, you 're not a golfer, but"—

"Sounds all right to me," said the renegade. "It is n't in that chap to lie."

Pritchard rang the bell.

There was complete silence in the room until Teddy Thornton once more stood before them.

The president cleared his throat and became unwontedly formal: "Mr. Thorn-

ton, the directors are satisfied that—that no blame attaches to you in the matter of—in the recent matter.” He cleared his throat again.

“I—I am very glad, Mr. Pritchard.” The fair, slightly freckled face glowed. “Would you tell me—what—”

“We have obtained”—the president coughed — “information — which makes your word entirely satisfactory.”

“Thank you!”

Just as he was turning to go, Teddy once more wheeled, frowning a little with a lingering anxiety. “Mr. Green asked me to tell you, sir, that Mur—that Mr. Murdock has gone.”

“Gone!”

“Yes, disappeared, just now.”

They looked at one another. Teddy proceeded:

“He just cleared out ten minutes ago without a word to any one. Mr. Green thought you ought to know.”

After a short pause, the president remarked dryly, “Yes, we ought to know.”

“Sure!” said McGlade, smoking with calm joy.

Teddy Thornton departed.

The president regarded his colleagues with a lurking smile. “How about it, gentlemen?” he said.

They chuckled gladly.

“No man can play straight golf and live crooked,” declared McGlade, wisely. “Atkinson, you don’t play; what do you think of it?”

“I never thought much of the fool game,” said Atkinson, solemnly; “but I ’m going to a professional next week to learn it.”

